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AUTHOR Koziol, Stephen M., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Because of the prevalent attitude among teachers of English at the secondary level that classroom dramatic activity is only a strong motivational device which encourages insights, interest, and open expression, the worth of dramatic activity in promoting cognitive development has been ignored. In fact, the concept of drama as a classroom catalyst dominates both writing in the field and workshop activity. However, some efforts are being made to identify and verify the cognitive value of dramatic activities. Further study, formal and informal, is necessary to ascertain the actual effects on learning of programs which include dramatic activity as a catalyst and those which include it as a major component. (JM)

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FJ

S. Koziol

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA ~~15213~~ 15260

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DRAMATICS AND COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS

Stephen Koziol

Although dramatic activity in the classroom is not a recent innovation, most investigations of the classroom behaviors of teachers of English suggest that such activity occurs infrequently especially at the secondary level. In their report of the NCTE sponsored study of the teaching of English in outstanding American schools, for example, Squire and Appleby (1968) did not even classify dramatic activity as a major instructional procedure and instead recorded its minimal occurrence under the heading "other." In his synthesis of an earlier review of observational studies of classroom verbal behavior, James Hoetker (1969) concluded that "drama has been so thoroughly subordinated, in American classrooms, to teacher-directed talk about literature that the state of the art may be described, accurately if not helpfully, in a single word: primitive." (p. x) More recently, George Hillocks (1972), in his national study of practices and policies in elective programs, found little difference in the use of dramatic activity between schools which have moved to elective programs and schools which have a more traditional program orientation. In both, teacher-directed verbal activity dominated the classroom while the use of participatory drama was negligible.

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If these studies reflect the general state of affairs with any realism, then two questions come immediately to mind--why does this situation exist and what can we do to effect an increase in the instructional use of dramatic activity at the secondary level?

Several hypotheses for the apparent paucity in the use of dramatic activity at the secondary level have been proposed. (Koziol, 1973) These have included the propositions (1) that dramatic activity is seldom dealt with in detail either as part of preservice or inservice training programs, (2) that short term workshops have been infrequent and ineffectual, (3) that most methods texts allocate little or no attention to it, (4) that few teachers have had guidance or instruction in how to lead such activity, and (5) that very few teachers have been given any assistance in relating dramatic activity to existing curricular objectives.

In Sense and Sensitivity: the Philosophy and Practice of English Teaching, J. W. Patrick Creber describes a transition period for British teachers of English which in several crucial ways is analogous to our own situation today. With respect to drama, Creber asserts that:

> The general tendency in drama in English schools at last shows signs of swinging away from play reading round the class towards some more 'free' dramatic activity, but there can be no doubt that a great deal of unsuitable material is treated in the old way--Shakespeare is quite often introduced in the second year, and not only with pupils in selective schools. Much of the reluctance to attempt any kind of free drama is understandable: the old reading and school play productions are known situations: to abandon these is to 'lay oneself open'--to let go of the bar and strike out in the deep end. (p. 86)

Although Creber's preception of an emerging shift in attitude on the part of British teachers seems somewhat premature for America today, he does identify several key issues in the attitude transition process. Of particular importance is his specification of the oral reading of plays in class as a relatively useless activity but one continued because it is a "known" situation--i.e., one that

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offers the teacher relative safety and security in her own role, in her sense of what she can lead or direct, and in her standing with respect to other teachers in the school. Some teachers seem to be more able and willing to explore. By and large, these tend to be individuals who can tolerate, both psychologically and emotionally, situations in which there is uncertainty and ambiguity rather than definitiveness and clarity. Yet, realistically, it is easy to understand why many teachers, given the fact of their having to deal with from 150 to 200 students a day, retreat into the haven of the known rather than explore the new and the unknown.

On the encouraging side, an increase in inservice workshops on improvisation and creative dramatics and the development of undergraduate and graduate courses in dramatics ought to begin at least to inform more teachers about these activities and hopefully will allow them to experience dramatic activity directly and consider its application to classroom settings. For the past two years, the Cleveland Playhouse in conjunction with the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the Cleveland Area Arts Council, and Cleveland State University has sponsored a School Drama Workshop Series in which various specialists in creative dramatics, pantomime, reader's theatre, and improvisation have provided half-day and full-day workshops for as many as 400 to 500 teachers from the greater Cleveland area. At the University of Pittsburgh, the faculty in the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts has initiated new courses in pantomime, children's theatre, and creative dramatics intended largely for preservice and inservice teachers of elementary age children. At the same time, the Department of Secondary Education has initiated a dramatics training program for preservice and inservice teachers of English at the secondary level. Although similar efforts in other cities, in school districts, and in colleges and universities are commendable, none may be effective if the

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the major perspective taken is that dramatic activity is only or even primarily a catalyst for other instruction.

The notion of drama as a catalyst in the classroom dominates most writing in the field and most activity in workshops. Dramatic activity is seen as an exceptionally strong motivating device--it stimulates interest, it activates new insights, and it encourages more open expression of ideas and feelings. Among its instructional values are such dimensions as enabling students to satisfy inner demands for personality fulfillment, promoting the individuality of individuals, developing abilities to concentrate, expanding the awareness of the senses, stimulating the uses of the imagination, learning to control the physical self, increasing oral fluency, sensitizing the individual to his own and other's emotions, and spurring intellectual development. In Development Through Drama, Brian Way synthesizes these perspectives by noting that "drama includes the discovery and exploration of one's environment, and within that environment are seen to exist many other people toward whom one begins to feel a growing sensitivity through each of the basic personal resources." (Way, p. 12)

Although most authors and workshop leaders in dramatics usually refer to the development of the intellectual capacities through drama, they seldom emphasize that dimension and seldom move beyond references at a vague and abstract level. Given the growing evidence which suggests that teachers of English at secondary level see themselves primarily as content specialists and that they place an emphasis on cognitive objectives over affective objectives, we must seriously question whether our present efforts to encourage the use of dramatic activities in secondary classrooms are enough. Two recent encounters with teachers of English on the matter of the use of dramatic activities may help to explain the source of my concern.

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The first situation had to do with a cooperating teacher and a student teacher in our preservice training program. In our preservice program, our prospective teachers of English participate in a variety of dramatic activities, analyze both their own and the leader's actions during the activities, and gain some experience in leading such activities with their peers. The expectation is that, as student teachers, our students will have the opportunity to use these activities in their teaching.

In the case at hand, the university supervisor reported openly hostile attitudes on the part of the student teacher both toward the use of dramatic activities and toward the program which encouraged them. The young man was a very bright and articulate student who seemed to have much promise as a teacher. His cooperating teacher had an excellent reputation as a teacher and had worked reasonably well with student teachers in the past. The practicum school was suburban and the teacher's schedule included only college preparatory track students at the 11th and 12th grade level.

My interview with the student teacher verified the perceptions of the supervisor. The young man was visibly upset about his preparation. From his perspective, we had failed him. We had emphasized gadgetry and had slighted the important matters; we had encouraged such procedures as small group activities, improvisation, and creative dramatics and had discouraged the use of lectures and recitations. In his vision of the real world of teaching, the former activities had little place and less value and the latter were what a good teacher did well.

Insight into the source of this attitude came when I discussed the matter with the cooperating teacher. After acknowledging the very positive relationship between herself and the student teacher, she admitted her surprise but pleasure

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at the position the young man had taken. Regarding the specifics of the issue, she noted proudly that "I told him he was free to try out a few of your 'gimmicks,' if he felt he needed to. I reminded him, however, that our students here are bright and interested in learning so that we don't really need any gimmicks. They might be useful if he was working with very slow students or unmotivated students, if all else failed."

Although the cooperating teacher's use of the word, gimmick, in itself indicated one part of the problem, the tone in which it was said and the context in which it was used had the added effect of identifying for the student teacher that, not only was dramatic activity in the classroom a relatively worthless procedure, but that a teacher who employed such activities did so only as a last resort. In effect, she had convinced the student teacher that to employ such activities in the classroom was an admission that he had failed as a teacher.

The second example is far less drastic and I think far more typical of the attitude of most teachers in the profession today. During a conversation with a second year teacher, the young lady began to describe in a very positive way her experiences with the use of improvisation. She found that kind of activity very helpful in revitalizing her students' enthusiasm and interest during longer literature units and found it most successful in providing her students with enjoyable experiences between units. Further discussion yielded the information that she had never considered these activities in other than a catalyst role and that she was totally unaware that they could in any way contribute to the cognitive development of her students. If either of these teacher's perspectives prevail among teachers in the profession, I fear that the likelihood of teachers of English making more extensive use of dramatic activities in their classrooms is limited and perhaps negligible.

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In the remaining time, I would like to consider some of the efforts already in progress to identify and verify the cognitive worth of dramatic activities. For convenience, let me separate these efforts into those leading to the establishment of a theoretical base and those leading to an empirical base.

In the former category, there seem to be two profitable directions. First, there is need to identify objectives in both the cognitive and affective domains as they relate specifically to the use of dramatic activities. A prototype for this kind of analysis is the recent work of Ann Shaw (Shaw, 1970) in which the author examined the objectives explicit and implicit in texts dealing with the use of creative dramatics with elementary school children. Having derived these objectives, the author proceeded to categorize them into the taxonomies developed by Bloom, et.al. for the cognitive domain and Krathwhol, et.al. in the Affective domain. Continued development of this kind of analysis for works on pantomime, improvisation, and role playing would be most helpful.

A second kind of analysis might be that of examining carefully the cognitive demands made upon students as they participate in dramatic activities. My own tentative efforts in this area (Koziol, 1973) would suggest that such analyses are possible and that they can lead to insights into the mental operations implicit in students' participation in such activities. It might also begin to verify at least theoretically that cognitive activity is taking place when a student is involved in trying to plan out a dramatic situation or demonstrate how a particular character might act or feel in different settings.

There is drastic need for both formal and informal study of the actual effects on learning of both programs which include dramatic activity as a catalyst and programs which include it as a major component. In a recent article, Dwight Burton (1973) identifies dramatics as an area about which there is virtually no substantive research. I would echo Burton's recommendation that researchers at

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colleges and universities begin to design and carry out studies which would attempt to identify the real, intended, and illusory effects on learning when students have adequate exposure to instructional programs which include strong dramatics components. The little research that is available generally focuses upon personal growth or social development and has dealt largely with changes in these areas during the elementary school years.

Although the development of a comprehensive series of formal studies is imperative, also important are the informal, action-research studies that can be directed and carried out by teachers in their own classrooms. In one of my graduate classes recently, a student approached me about a specific problem he was having at his school. This was his sixth year of teaching and he was concerned about the mounting criticism of his procedures from his fellow English teachers and from several administrators. At the source of the problem was his belief that students in his drama elective classes profited from a performance orientation. As part of instruction, students would work together in groups of 7-9 to plan out performances of different scenes in the play under consideration. Although this planning, the practice, and the final performance before other class members took up a major portion of class time, the young man felt that his students' response to the plays was better and their understanding deeper with this approach than when they spent their time only discussing the plays.

With a little encouragement, the young man set up a very simple experimental/control group study dealing with his students' comprehension of the play, Our Town. While the experimental group experienced the performance oriented unit, the control group experienced a discussion oriented unit. Both groups were comparable in academic ability and general academic background. Comprehension was determined by means of an objective test developed from two commercially available comprehension tests on the play.

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The significantly better performance of the experimental group on the comprehension test was most gratifying. The results reaffirmed for the teacher that his convictions were valid and they provided him with evidence to counter the criticisms of his peers and school administrators. Although the results from this kind of study are far from generalizable, they do suggest that cognitive effects through dramatic activity are not just an illusion. At another level, the entire situation I have described provides tangible evidence that a teacher need not subject himself to the unwarranted pressures from peers and administrators. If we in fact believe that dramatic activity is worthwhile and that it promotes cognitive development as well as personal growth and social development, we must be ready to provide the evidence to demonstrate it. If we continue to ignore the cognitive dimensions, I fear that progress toward increased use of dramatics will be minimal at best.

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